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ABSTRACT

Suggesting that the old saying "It's not what you say, it's how you say it" rings true for one educational leader, a Speech Pathologist, keenly aware of the necessity of effective communication and its impact on leadership. Possessing the quality of effective communication makes for a high quality leader because it enables one to express ideas successfully. Effective verbal and non-verbal communication helps to establish credibility during message delivery. Articulation, fluency, language, voice, listening and writing skills, as well as the use of gestures are dynamic elements that enhance the leader. The paper discusses these communication qualities which are essential for effective leadership. (Contains 16 references.) (Author/RS)

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Running head: COMMUNICATION IN EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

The Role of Communication in Effective Leadership

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Abstract

As a Speech Pathologist, I am keenly aware of the necessity of effective communication and its impact on leadership. Possessing the quality of effective communication makes for a high quality leader because it enables one to express ideas successfully. Effective verbal and non-verbal communication helps to establish credibility during message delivery. Articulation, fluency, language, voice, listening and writing skills, as well as the use of gestures are dynamic elements that enhance the leader. In this paper, I discuss these communication qualities which are essential for effective leadership.

The Role of Communication in Effective Leadership

Researchers have examined traits and abilities of effective leaders for many years. Identification of leadership characteristics is important information that may be utilized in training programs for future leaders. These traits, abilities or characteristics include physical features such as height, weight, and athletic ability (Bass & Stodgill, 1990). Theorists also examined personal characteristics, which include intelligence, originality, political savvy, and verbal and non-verbal communication.

Communication is one of the key responsibilities of an effective administrative leader. As far back as Barnard (1938), verbal communication was documented as an important activity in the work of managers. Subsequent studies in the corporate and industrial worlds have shown that oral communication consumes over half of the manager's workday (Bass & Stodgill, 1990).

The ability to clearly communicate during speaking and writing tasks is an essential component of effective leadership. Spoken language is our most human characteristic, which is fundamental for learning, working, and socialization. There is certainly a direct correlation between effective leadership and effective communication within the working environment. "Effective communication occurs when each party conveys ideas that are accurately understood (Kaye, 1998, p. 44)". Some employers have noted, "graduates lack communication and problem-solving skills (1998, p. 5) ". As a result, universities like Northeast Louisiana University have offered an Integrative Business Seminar (IBS) which focuses on "skills in communication, team building, leadership, and problem solving in hands-on learning environment (Luse, 1999, p. 5)". Learning institutions along with business and industry are now recognizing the impact of

effective communication and leadership in the work environment. Additionally, Eastern Michigan University has recognized the importance of focusing on communication skills in their leadership training programs. Of the program, Stewart Tubbs, Dean of EMU's College of Business says "Classes that focus on leadership, communication, creativity and managing change are being added because they are important (Mercer, 1996, p.21)".

According to Nicolosi, Harryman, and Kresheck (1996) communication may be defined as "any means by which an individual relates experiences, ideals, knowledge and feelings to another including speech, sign language, gestures and writing (p.66)". Communication is very important because followers judge leaders by this ability to communicate including factors such as proper command of the English language and even eye contact. According to Rider (1999) "the ability to clearly communicate when speaking and writing will put you in the lead, whatever your position or specialty (p. 23)". Leaders are judged as more competent if their speech is fluent because it appears as if they are comfortable with their subject matter. It may appear that the leader may lack knowledge of subject matter if he "stumbles" over words or inserts markers such as "uh" during conversation.

Several features that impact communication include articulation, fluency, voice, and language, listening skills and gestures. These very distinct features of language when blended together yield successful communication power.

Articulation is defined as the way sounds are formed according to Nicolosi, Harryman, and Kresheck (1996). Clear and crisp speech is produced as a result of rapidly moving articulators (lips, tongue, jaw) impeding the out going air stream. A leader who possesses clear articulation or pronunciation is perceived as more intelligent.

"Pronunciation is vital to credibility because pronunciation is probably the most dynamic feature of a voice. A speaker with poor pronunciation is perceived to be lower in competence, trustworthiness and dynamism than a speaker with good pronunciation (Fatt, 1999, p.37)". The leader's speech intelligibility should be accurate and precise rendering verbal messages highly intelligible to all listeners.

Nicolosi, Harryman, and Kresheck (1996) define fluency as " smoothness with which sounds, syllables, words, and phrases are joined together during oral language; lack of hesitations or repetitions in speaking (p.115)". Fluency of speech is a trait that is positively associated with leadership according to Bass and Stodgill (1990). In addition, they reported that "leaders were more fluent of speech, and leaders excel in speaking ability (p. 63)". Fluency denotes the rate at which a person speaks. According to Heinze and Johnson (1990), fluency may be described as " the flow of speech – how one word flows into the next word and one sentence flows into the next sentence (p. 13)". Speaking at the appropriate rate is vital to understanding the speaker's message. Speaking too quickly can make the message unintelligible. Speaking too slowly can cause the audience to "tune out" or lose interest in the message. Haddock (1995) contends that leaders should "avoid vocal hesitations that could hinder effective communication. Speak with an even pace and enunciate clearly (p.56)".

A dynamic leader must also possess a powerful voice, which emanates control. A strong confident voice says to the listener, I am confident and in control. According to Fatt (1999) "A person with a weak voice is usually perceived as lacking confidence, which lowers credibility. A strong voice, on the other hand, shows great confidence (p. 37)." An important vocal quality to consider would be the use proper pitch. The melody

of language should vary in pitch and intonation in order to retain the attention of the listener. The proper use of stress and intonation during speaking adds to the interest of the message being delivered to the listener. A monotonic speech is lack luster and boring causing the leader to loose his audience and his credibility. Shakeshaft (1986) reported "a definite trend for teachers to rate the tone of voice of leaders as confident and the tone of voice of nonleaders as lacking in confidence (p. 63)". Also the characteristic of a pleasant voice may also be correlated with effective leaders.

Listening skills are of vital importance within the realm of leadership. An effective leader must be viewed as approachable and willing to listen. As an effective leader, one must be willing to accept questions. "As a listener, you may hear questions that seem 'dumb'. Instead of responding with disdain, treat the sender with respect and courtesy (Kaye, 1998, p. 44)". Questions should be asked which help the leader determine if persons understand the intended message. To gain information, introduce ideas, seek clarification, make suggestions, and check understanding are certainly reasons why an effective leader should ask questions and listen to responses. "Savvy leaders encourage questions because they lead to an open dialogue (1998, p.44)".

Within "active listening – minimal responses such as "um-umm," "uh-huh," "yeah," and "right" are commonly employed with the intention of extending the communication of the other person and eliciting more information (Carr, 1995, p.41)". It is important to pay complete attention to the entire message being sent. "Effective listening is a complex process requiring an alert, open mind (Kaye, 1998, p.44)".

The use of non-verbal behaviors and gestures within message delivery can certainly enhance any speech. Eye contact is one of the most note worthy behaviors

which affect credibility. If a leader fails to maintain eye contact when speaking, he may appear evasive or even dishonest. "Studies on eye contact and its effect on communication and credibility find that maintaining gaze while communicating is beneficial to credibility, and, conversely, averting eye contact is detrimental to credibility (Fatt, 1999, p.37)". Information gathered regarding eye contact has also indicated it affects three components of credibility: dynamism, competence and trustworthiness. Competence ratings were substantially increased for leaders who demonstrated high eye contact with their audience. On the other hand, qualities such as shifty eyes, looking down at notes for long periods of time, and excessive eye blinking have shown to lower credibility.

The use of gestures is a quite powerful way to enhance message delivery. A speaker simply standing and talking without movement is dull. However, too many gestures and gross movements can be distracting resulting in loss of audience interest. According to Fatt (1999) "Beneficial gestures usually are performed with the hands, arms and head. These should be used to emphasize a point (p. 39) ". Gestures should flow along with the vocal message in order to be advantageous. The key to utilizing them is the appearance of spontaneity and naturalness during effective communication so that the gestures are performed without nervousness. Haddock (1995) indicated that leaders should "use only body movements and gestures necessary to make your point but not more (p. 56)".

According to Carr (1995), oral language can "shape and empower its users (p.39)". Language is a powerful tool for exercising influence, and the way ideas are expressed in interpersonal communication often shapes not on how ideas are perceived

but, by implication, how the speaker is perceived as well (1995, p.42)". Positive language, meaning few negative words used, is attributed to female leaders.

Linguistic abilities also correlate positively with effective leadership. In her reports on communication styles, Shakeshaft (1986) notes that noted significant difference in scores on test of linguistic abilities for highly paid successful leaders. Studies also reported verbal ability to be correlated with the capacity to influence others.

Leaders utilize both oral and written communication. Oral communication however is most prevalent. Effective use of oral and written forms of communication is essential to administrators. Vividness and originality of expression and facility of conversation were associated with successful social relationships for leaders. When speaking it is best to be concise and avoid the use of jargon and slang terms.

Studies have shown differences in verbal communication and language use between male and female administrators. A number of researchers have documented differences between male and female language (Shakeshaft, 1986). Perceptual and behavioral differences were noted within the language patterns of administrators. The study revealed women utilize more grammatically correct speech patterns than males, and they maintain formal language patterns rather than the utilization of jargon and slang as seen more so in men. Variations are noted however in women's ranges of pitch loudness and rate of speech. Shakeshaft (1986) noted, "They also use different words than men. Women are more likely to use expressive language and intensifiers such as 'so,' such', adorable,' and 'lovely' (p.180)". Also the research indicated women are more likely than men to implore the use of questions to express opinions. "Women tend to use language that encourages community building and are more polite and cheerful than the language

of men (1986, p.182)". Language patterns in spoken language appear to echo those in written discourse for women and men.

Written language is also an important component of communication worth examining. Evers (1993) advises leaders to write in concise plain language when communicating with employees. He even suggests that leaders train their employees in this same fashion. He authored a book entitled Tips for Greater Writing which is a reference designed for "executives, managers, supervisors and others who want to improve their communication skills (p. S4)". In his book he gives seventeen ways for improving leaders' effective writing abilities. "Being specific to avoid misunderstanding, avoiding redundancies, being positive as this motivates response and turning a passive voice into active voice (p. S4)" are only a few of his recommendations for effective workplace written communication. He feels that "Much of the writing is unnecessary, most of it is poorly written, and all of it has to be read. A great amount of time is wasted by the 60 million people who have to write on the job and by those who have to read all of this ineffective writing (p. S5)."

The constructive use of humor is a way leaders can "lighten up" a stressful situation. Olliff (1999) states "humor, an individual phenomenon, is the ability to think about and recognize the incongruity and absurdity of situations. Laughter and pleasure are the results of understanding and identifying with the subject or situation (p. 33)". Humor can serve as an effective tool for improving communication between employers and employees by lessening stress and putting people at ease. Bourrie (1995) noted if leaders are," less stressed and people are more comfortable with you, this makes them open themselves up to you with opportunities (p. 76)".

An effective leader must learn how to communicate, and there are a number of ways to develop communication skills. A mentor who possesses above average communication skills would be a good resource to assist in the acquisition of needed skills. Phillips advises that leaders should identify another senior-level executive within or outside the organization that can serve as a mentor. Then ask for his or her advice on communication – and act on it. (Phillips, 1998, p. 90)".

Bookstores and libraries also have many references to offer for executives to sharpen their verbal communication and presentation skills. Leaders and future leaders can locate needed reference materials to enhance desired qualities and gain help with written and verbal expression.

Another alternative would be to seek out educational leadership and management courses and professional public speaking organizations. By surfing the Internet, one can locate numerous businesses and consultants that advertise coaching services in the area of communication. The goal of these organizations is to improve business leaders abilities to deliver speeches with authority and be a dynamic communicator in any setting.

Toastmasters International is an organization whose mission is to improve public speaking abilities of their members. Their philosophy focuses on leadership and communication. "Leadership cannot be learned in a day. It takes practice." In Toastmasters, members build leadership skills by organizing and conducting meetings and motivating others to help them. Club leadership roles and a leadership development program also offer opportunities to learn and practice." According to Phillips (1998), "communication skills are essential to effective management and career development (p. 90)".

Some additional factors to consider which affect communication and perception include posture, facial expression, personal appearance, and environmental factors.

"The difference between gesture and posture is that a gesture conveys a message by using one part of the body, whereas a postural shift involves the movement of the body as a whole (Fatt, 1999 p.37)". Postures such as folded arms and crossed legs signal a closed personality and lack of confidence. Conversely, an open or relaxed posture that includes arms spread in a relaxed manner demonstrates confidence. As in the use of gestures, posture should flow along with the conversation and should be changed periodically.

A leader's facial expression is quite an observable characteristic of non-verbal communication. Fatt (1999) states, "the overall facial expression is important to a receiver's perception of credibility (p.37)". Facial expression should always communicate interest and attention in order to maintain credibility.

"Personal appearance is a major factor used to judge a person simply because the first impression of a person is based on appearance (Fatt, 1999, p. 37)". Physical appearance creates a picture as to the leader's confidence and competence. Attractive persons are judged to be more credible more so than less attractive people. Leaders can change their look by modifying clothing, hairstyles and other factors. Generally, clothing, hairstyles, and make-up should flatter one's appearance rather that accentuate weaknesses.

Environmental factors that impact communication include seating arrangement and objects in the environment. "The environment in which communication occurs can have a great effect on the communication and the leadership portrayed (Fatt, 1999, p.

37)". Within group communication, communication should be centralized. This demonstrates the leader acting as the center of communication and in a sense enhancing his leadership function. When given a choice of settings, studies have shown that face to face communication is optimal. "Given a choice of seat or resting area, a communicator should choose the most central position available to receive more communication flow (1999, p. 38)". Aside from seat position, aesthetic objects lend to the leaders judged credibility. Plants, pictures and professional objects displayed in offices of effective leaders reflect authority, dynamism and trustworthiness.

According to Bass (1990) "effective leadership cannot be maintained in an organization without an adequate system of intercommunication. Some of the most searching studies of leadership should reveal the capacity for ready communication to be one of the skills associated with leadership (p. 64)". Strong and powerful communicators are needed to serve as effective leaders within organizations.

Relevant literature from business and educational fields has certainly demonstrated the importance of effective written and verbal communication for leaders today. Effective communication skills are just one behavior that leaders must have to be successful within the workplace environment. The effects of poor communication on individuals and organizations can certainly be detrimental.

Within any organization effective quality communication skills for leaders are certainly blueprints to success. Whether conveying ideas in verbal or written fashion, it is imperative that leaders incorporate effective communication which includes speaking, listening, reading and writing to enhance a successful work place environment. Effective leaders realize that success requires a combination of the characteristics of language

tailored to each particular situation. Certainly the old saying, "It's not what you say, it's how you say it" rings true for educational leaders.

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